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24% of internet users have made phone calls online

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After years of modest activity, online phone calling has taken off as 24% of online Americans say have placed calls using the internet

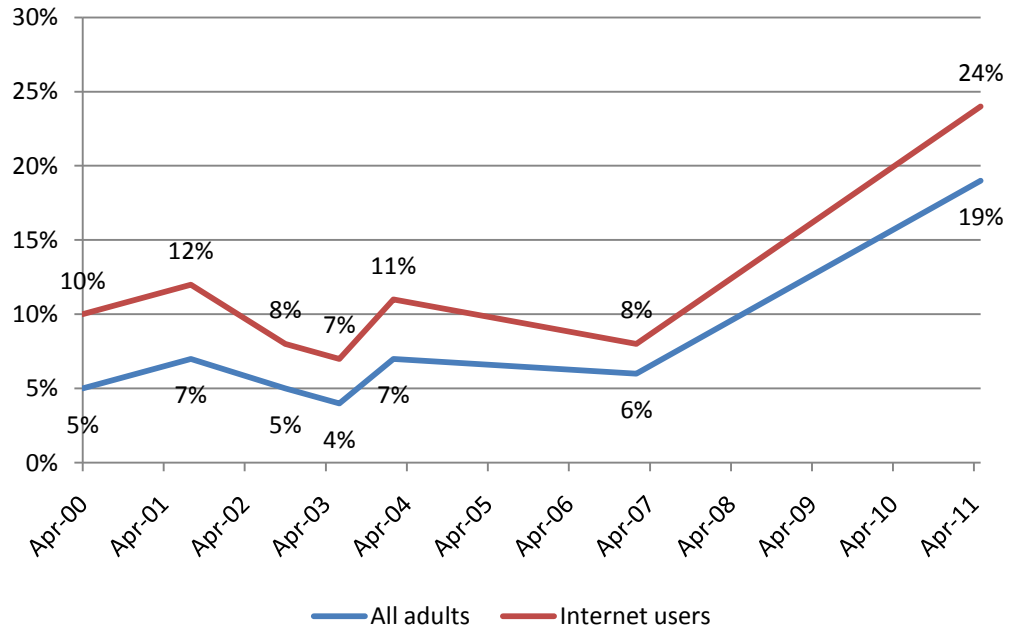
A quarter of American adult internet users (24%) have placed phone calls online. That amounts to 19% of all American adults.

On any given day 5% of internet users are going online to place phone calls.

Both figures are marked increases from previous readings in surveys by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. Using different question wording, the Project found in February 2007 that 8% of internet users (6% of all adults) had placed calls online and 2% of internet users were making calls on any given day. At various points during the 2000s we asked similar questions and found that at most about a tenth of internet users had ever used the internet to place calls and the daily figure never rose above 1% of internet users.

This was the first time that Pew Internet had asked the question using this wording: "Please tell me if you ever use the internet to make a phone call online, using a service such as Skype or Vonage?/ Did you happen to do this yesterday, or not?" This was the first time that we asked the question and specifically referred to Skype, the popular global service that was recently purchased by Microsoft for $8.5 billion.

Growth in online phone callers



Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, April 26-May22, 2011 tracking survey. N for internet users asked this question=846 adult internet users ages 18 and older. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error= +/- 3.7 percentage points.

That changed wording might account for some of the increase, but there is little doubt that the popularity of online phone calling has picked up over time for several reasons: It is free or cheaper than other types of phone calling; it is enabled on many handheld devices like smartphones and tablet computers; more and more meetings and classroom activities exploit online phone connections along with video capabilities; and more families and friends are building online calls into their communications streams.

It is interesting to note that the percentage of American internet users who have placed phone calls online is now about the same as the percent who were aware in 2004 that it was possible to use the internet for phone calling. Pew Internet did a survey in February 2004 asking about the incidence level of online phone calling, which then stood at 11% of internet users. The 2004 survey also asked how many internet users were aware of the concept of Voice over Internet Protocols (VoIP) and found that 27% of internet users were aware of it.[1]

The rise of video calling, especially on smart phones, is also part of the story. In the current survey, we found that 7% of cell phone owners had participated in video calls or online chats with their handheld device.

The newest findings come from national survey findings from a poll conducted on landline and cell phones between April 26 and May 22, 2011 among 2,277 adults (age 18 and older). The online phone calling question was asked of 846 of them. The margin of error among the internet users is +/- 3.7 percentage points.

The table below gives a demographic portrait of those who are using the internet for phone calling. There are notable differences tied to socio-economic factors: Internet users with higher levels of education and household income are more likely to use the internet for phone calls than others.

Similarly, internet users who live in urban and suburban areas are more likely than rural residents to use the internet this way. There are also modest differences tied to age: Younger internet users are more likely to place online calls than older users.

[1] Horrigan, John and Alan Hepner. "27% of online Americans have heard of VOIP telephone service." June 27, 2004. Available at: http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2004/VoIP-Awareness-in-America/Data-Memo/Findings.aspx

Online phone callers

% of internet users within each group who use the internet to make phone calls

Among all internet users	24%
Gender	
Men	24
Women	24
Age	
18-29	27
30-49	25
50-64	19
65+	18
Race/Ethnicity	
White, non-Hispanic	21
Black, non-Hispanic	21
Hispanic	27
Household Income	
Less than $30,000	13
$30,000-$49,999	24
$50,000-$74,999	22
$75,000+	36
Education level	
High School Diploma or less	14
Some College	22
College+	35
Community type	
Urban	25
Suburban	27
Rural	13

Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, April 26-May22, 2011 tracking survey. N for internet users asked this question=846 adult internet users ages 18 and older. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error= +/- 3.7 percentage points.

Survey question

Spring Change Assessment Survey 2011 Final Topline 5/25/2011

Data for April 26–May 22, 2011

Princeton Survey Research Associates International
for the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project

Sample: n= 2,277 national adults, age 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews
Margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points for results based on Total [n=2,277]
Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on internet users [n=1,701]
Form B (the form used for online phone calling question) [n=846]
Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on cell phone users [n=1,914]
Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on SNS or Twitter users [n=1,015]

WEB1 Next... Please tell me if you ever use the internet to do any of the following things. Do you ever use the internet to…[INSERT; RANDOMIZE]? / Did you happen to do this **yesterday**, or not?[2] Based on Form B internet users [N=846]

	TOTAL HAVE EVER DONE THIS	DID YESTERDAY	HAVE NOT DONE THIS	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
Make a phone call online, using a service such as Skype or Vonage[3]					
% of internet users					
Current	24	5	76	*	0
February 2007	8	2	91	*	--
February 2004[4]	11	NA	89	*	--
June 2003[5]	7	*	93	*	--
October 2002	8	1	92	*	--
Sept 12-17, 2001	12	1	87	*	--
Aug 2001	12	1	88	*	--
April 2000	10	1	90	*	--

[2] Prior to January 2005, question wording was "Please tell me if you ever do any of the following when you go online. Do you ever…?/Did you happen to do this yesterday, or not?" Unless otherwise noted, trends are based on all internet users for that survey.

[3] Prior to May 2011, item wording was "Make a phone call online"

[4] In February 2004, this question was asked as separate item: "Have you ever made a telephone call over the Internet?"

[5] In June 2003 and before, item wording was "Make a phone call online, using the Internet."

Methodology

This report is based on the findings of a survey on Americans' use of the Internet. The results in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International from April 26 to May 22, 2011, among a sample of 2,277 adults, age 18 and older. Telephone interviews were conducted in English and Spanish by landline (1,522) and cell phone (755, including 346 without a landline phone). For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 2.4 percentage points. For results based Internet users (n=1,701), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.7 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys may introduce some error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

A combination of landline and cellular random digit dial (RDD) samples was used to represent all adults in the continental United States who have access to either a landline or cellular telephone. Both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI) according to PSRAI specifications. Numbers for the landline sample were selected with probabilities in proportion to their share of listed telephone households from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained three or more residential directory listings. The cellular sample was not list-assisted, but was drawn through a systematic sampling from dedicated wireless 100-blocks and shared service 100-blocks with no directory-listed landline numbers.

New sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. The sample was released in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger population. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. At least 7 attempts were made to complete an interview at a sampled telephone number. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Each number received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone available. For the landline sample, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult male or female currently at home based on a random rotation. If no male/female was available, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult of the other gender. For the cellular sample, interviews were conducted with the person who answered the phone. Interviewers verified that the person was an adult and in a safe place before administering the survey. Cellular sample respondents were offered a post-paid cash incentive for their participation. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day.

Weighting is generally used in survey analysis to compensate for sample designs and patterns of non-response that might bias results. A two-stage weighting procedure was used to weight this dual-frame sample. The first-stage weight is the product of two adjustments made to the data – a Probability of Selection Adjustment (PSA) and a Phone Use Adjustment (PUA). The PSA corrects for the fact that respondents in the landline sample have different probabilities of being sampled depending on how many adults live in the household. The PUA corrects for the overlapping landline and cellular sample frames.

The second stage of weighting balances sample demographics to population parameters. The sample is balanced by form to match national population parameters for sex, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region (U.S. Census definitions), population density, and telephone usage. The White, non-Hispanic subgroup is also balanced on age, education and region. The basic weighting parameters came from a special analysis of the Census Bureau's 2010 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) that included all households in the continental United States. The population density parameter was derived from Census 2000 data. The cell phone usage parameter came from an analysis of the January-June 2010 National Health Interview Survey.[6]

[6] Blumberg SJ, Luke JV. Wireless substitution: Early release of estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, January-June, 2010. National Center for Health Statistics. December 2010.

Following is the full disposition of all sampled telephone numbers:

Table 2:Sample Disposition

Landline	Cell	
32,909	19,899	Total Numbers Dialed
1,416	364	Non-residential
1,428	35	Computer/Fax
32	----	Cell phone
16,833	8,660	Other not working
1,629	287	Additional projected not working
11,571	10,553	Working numbers
35.2%	53.0%	Working Rate
543	96	No Answer / Busy
3,091	3,555	Voice Mail
53	10	Other Non-Contact
7,884	6,892	Contacted numbers
68.1%	65.3%	Contact Rate
489	1,055	Callback
5,757	4,618	Refusal
1,638	1,219	Cooperating numbers
20.8%	17.7%	Cooperation Rate
56	33	Language Barrier
----	426	Child's cell phone
1,582	760	Eligible numbers
96.6%	62.3%	Eligibility Rate
60	5	Break-off
1,522	755	Completes
96.2%	99.3%	Completion Rate
13.6%	11.5%	Response Rate

The disposition reports all of the sampled telephone numbers ever dialed from the original telephone number samples. The response rate estimates the fraction of all eligible respondents in the sample that were ultimately interviewed. At PSRAI it is calculated by taking the product of three component rates:

- Contact rate – the proportion of working numbers where a request for interview was made
- Cooperation rate – the proportion of contacted numbers where a consent for interview was at least initially obtained, versus those refused

- Completion rate – the proportion of initially cooperating and eligible interviews that were completed

Thus the response rate for the landline sample was 13.6 percent. The response rate for the cellular sample was 11.5 percent.